Creating and Sharing Writing iRubrics

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Bio Data

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Abstract

Rubrics are scoring guides, consisting of specific pre-established performance criteria, used in evaluating student work. iRubric is a comprehensive rubric development, assessment, and sharing tool. It shows the major skills and sub-skills to be mastered, the different mastery levels, and marks allocated to each level. Rubrics can be collaboratively assessed with colleagues, classes and other individuals. Students and colleagues can be engaged in building classroom activities, assessing ePortfolios, or may use the powerful collaborative assessment tools as surveys and evaluation mechanisms. iRubrics also empower schools with an easy-to-use system for monitoring student learning outcomes and aligning with standards, show level of performance, serve as a guide for beginning instructors & students, show what is expected from students, save grading time and student get a copy of the scored rubric securely. Rubric scores are automatically adjusted to the coursework grading scale and posted on the gradebook in an online course.

This article shows how rubrics can be created for writing courses in English as a foreign language by teachers and students using the iRubric tool of Rcampus. Sample writing iRubrics are used for illustration.

Key Words: Rubric, scoring guide, iRubric, expectations, scores, online, gradebook

Introduction

Rubrics are tools for assessing instruction and performance according to a set of predetermined scaled expectations and criteria. Rubrics have been popular in assessing learning outcomes in education for over two decades. They are being used in countless classrooms to evaluate an individual work or a student's entire body of work. A review of the literature has shown that Rubrics have been identified as an important tool for assessing student performance, teacher effectiveness, and program quality. For example, Jonsson & Svingby (2007) reviewed 75 empirical research studies on rubrics and concluded that rubrics had the potential of promoting learning and/or improving instruction because they make expectations and criteria explicit, and also facilitate feedback and self-assessment. In addition, rubrics enhance the reliable scoring of performance assessments, especially if they are analytical, topic-specific, and complemented with exemplars and/or rater training. Jonsson & Svingby pointed out more benefits of using scoring rubrics in performance assessments such as increased consistency of scoring, and the possibility to facilitate valid judgment of complex competencies, and the promotion of learning.

Other studies have found that using a rubric for self-assessment can help elementary school students produce more effective writing. Instructional rubrics also enhanced class engagement behaviors of students with mild mental retardation drastically. The achievement of lesson objectives by all the participants evaluated through rubrics was statistically significant (Lee & Lee, 2009; Andrade Du & Wang 2008).

Educators accustomed to using rubrics as a tool for improving students' writing are applying the same strategy to monitoring and assessing a range of

authentic learning tasks. Rubrics set the standards for assessing both teaching practices and student achievement. They encourage students to shift their thinking from "What have I learned?" to "How well have I learned it" (Yoshina & Harada, 2007).

The effects of teacher knowledge of rubrics on the achievement of students were studied by Schafer, Swanson Bene & Newberry (2001). Results favored the achievement of students whose teachers had received rubric training. Interviews with teachers who were mentored to use rubrics showed that those teachers found rubrics useful for grading assessments and for conveying assessment expectations to students (Maxwell, 2010).

Results of a study by Silvestri & Oescher (2006) showed that there is a need to develop and use rubrics to ensure the reliability of assessments addressing critical thinking skills. The author also observed that is also a need for using rubrics in the teaching of English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) to college students. For example, at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, students majoring in translation take 4 levels of English language courses (listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary building, and grammar) in the first 4 semesters of the translation program. At each level, each course is offered to several sections taught by different instructors. EFL instructors teaching the same course offered to the different sections of a particular level vary from semester to semester. Those EFL instructors have varying backgrounds, experiences, expectations, assessment tools and assessment criteria. In addition, results of an exploratory study conducted by the author showed that students in the different sections of language courses often receive tests and homework assignments with little or no description of how they will be graded. They complete their assignments and the instructor grades them based on some unseen criteria. For students, parents, program coordinators and college administrators, this method of student assessment seems vague and sometimes unfair.

In addition, many instructors are unable to accurately and dispassionately assess the projects that they want their students to explore, such as posters, skits

or plays, PowerPoint presentations, websites and videos (Shepherd & Mullane (2008). Another problem is discrepancies in scoring. These discrepancies appear to be related to whether the task contained familiar or unfamiliar content and the mix of procedure and explanation the task required. Several factors related to discrepancies, such as leniency errors, teacher knowledge, and the halo effect are also discussed (Meier Rich & Cady, 2006).

To help EFL instructors follow reliable and valid assessment criteria, the present study proposes the use of digital rubrics to assess students' exams and assignments in the different language courses offered by COLT, especially writing courses. This article shows how digital rubrics can be created for writing courses in EFL using the iRubric tool of Rcampus, an open access Online Course Management System (www.rcampus.org). It defines rubrics and iRubric, gives types of rubrics and iRubrics; explains the components of a digital rubric; shows the steps of building a digital rubric; shows how a digital rubric can be applied to an assignment, how to analyze and report digital grading results to students, other instructors, program coordinators and administrators and gives the benefits of using digital rubrics.

According to the Rcampus Online Course Management system, digital rubrics have several advantages: They show levels of performance and what is expected from students. They serve as a guide for beginning instructors and students. They save grading time. They empower schools with an easy-to-use system for monitoring student learning outcomes and for aligning with standards. Rubrics can be collaboratively assessed with colleagues and classes and can be shared with other members through the Rcampus rubric gallery. Students and colleagues can be engaged in building classroom activities and assessing ePortfolios, or they may use other powerful collaborative assessment tools as surveys and evaluation mechanisms. Students get a copy of the scored rubric securely. The digital rubric scores are automatically adjusted to the coursework grading scale and posted on the gradebook in an online course. Teachers can bookmark rubrics for future reference. They can showcase their rubrics on their Rcampus website. Teachers can find a rubric that they like and re-purpose it for their use.

Several researchers such as McGatha & Darcy (2010); Allen & Tanner (2006); Callison (2006); Wang & Rairigh (2006); Lunsford & Melear (2004); Andrade (2000); Arter (2000); Boston (2002); Crawford (2001); Foley, Remley, Morales, Grega, Lantz, Haughton & Shalyefu-Shimhopileni (2001); Kist (2001); Schafer, Swanson, Bene & Newberry (2001); Montgomery (2000); Smith & Hanna (1998); and Taggart, Phifer, Nixon & Wood (1998) indicated that development and use of rubrics in assessment have the following benefits:

1.   Instructional rubrics are easy to use and explain, communicate instructor expectations clearly, provide students with constructive feedback, and support learning, skill development, understanding, and good thinking. Rubrics are helpful in specifying which criteria student performance and proficiency levels should be evaluated against. Rubrics can be designed to formulate standards for levels of accomplishment and can be used to guide and improve performance. They can be used to make these standards clear and explicit to students.

2.   For instructors, rubrics can be valuable in helping them ensure that they are teaching the important points in a subject and that their students are learning them (Cooper & Gargan, 2009). They are useful as a formative assessment tool. They can use rubrics to analyze student work, so that they can plan their instruction and provide beneficial feedback to students that will lead to higher quality work. When good rubrics are used well, EFL instructors and students receive extensive feedback on the quality and quantity of student learning. When scoring rubrics are used in large-scale assessment, technical questions related to inter-rater reliability tend to dominate the literature. Well developed rubrics help instructors define learning objectives so that they can plan instruction more effectively, be more consistent in scoring student work, and be more systematic in reporting student progress. Rubrics also allow the instructor to create something unique to local needs, yet fulfill the mandate of having a system that is uniform and consistent. Teachers in different subject disciplines have successfully used rubrics to achieve educational goals.

3.   Rubrics, scoring guides, and performance criteria help define important outcomes for students. Using instructional rubrics promotes student learning and improves the quality of teaching. With the rubric as a guide, students learn to monitor their own progress and make improvements in a timely manner (Yoshina & Harada, 2007). Rubrics guide students in their work and assist teachers with grading. They help students to evaluate the quality of their work as they progress through a class. They may be very helpful to educators in helping to evaluate the Uniform Portfolio that must be kept on every student within a program, according to the Performance Accountability System. Rubrics offer productive opportunities for enriching student-teacher relationships and improving writing instruction (Martins, David, 2008).

4.   They serve as a blueprint to communicate the high expectations of Public Instruction for all schools, as an internal self-assessment tool to be used by the educational community at the local level, and as an external assessment tool to be used by ADE Solutions Teams. They may also be used in other appropriate external assessment activities. Rubrics help schools, departments and colleges assess the strengths and limitations of their instructional practices and organizational conditions. Developing and using rubrics gives educators access to valuable information about student performance that cannot be obtained from traditional assessment approaches.

The Writing Curriculum at COLT

 Students majoring in translation at the COLT, King Saudi University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia take 4 English writing courses in the first four semesters of college: Writing I (4 hours), Writing II (4 hours), Writing III (3 hours) and Writing IV (3 hours) where they practice the process of writing. In addition, they take 4 listening, 4 speaking, 4 reading, 3 grammar, and 2 vocabulary building courses.

    The textbook used in the freshman Writing I course is *Interactions I: Writing (Silver Edition)* by Segal and Cheryl Pavlik & Margaret Segal (2007), McGraw-Hill Higher Education which was assigned by COLT. The aim of the book is to develop the students' ability to write a cohesive paragraph that has a topic

sentence and supporting details with minimal grammatical, spelling, punctuation and indentation errors. The book consists of 10 chapters. Each chapter has a theme and is divided into the following parts: exploring ideas, building vocabulary, organizing ideas, developing cohesion and style, some grammatical points, writing the first draft, editing practice, writing the second draft and journal writing. In each chapter, tasks and skills are practiced one step at a time, before the students put them all together in their paragraph.

Use of Rubrics in Writing Assessment

Definition of Rubrics

Rubrics are rating scales - as opposed to checklists - that are used with performance assessments. They are scoring guides, consisting of specific pre-established performance criteria, used in evaluating student work. Rubrics are scoring instruments used to evaluate student performance or products resulting from a performance task (Mertler2001).

Rubrics can generally be divided into *holistic* or *analytic* rubrics, and *task-specific* or *general* rubrics. *Holistic* rubrics consist of a set of generalized descriptions of "above average," "average," and "below average" that are in the developer's mind; what is being evaluated is put on a continuum of stages and require the teacher to score the overall process or product as a whole, without judging the component parts separately; whereas *analytic* rubrics allow one to measure something against several different criteria. They are preferred when a fairly focused type of response is required (Nitko, 2001; Kist, 2001).

Prior to designing a specific rubric, a teacher must decide whether the performance or product will be scored holistically or analytically (Airasian, 2000 & 2001). The process of developing an analytic rubric has several steps: (i) making a list of desired characteristics; (ii) looking at each characteristic, deciding what "excellent,""above average,""average," and "below average" look like; (iii) weighting each criterion (Nitko, 2001; Kist, 2001).

Digital Rubric Makers

There several Online Rubric Makers/Builders on the web such as:

- http://www.rcampus.com/indexrubric.cfm?nocache=1288472509512
- http://rubistar.4teachers.org/
- http://www.teach-nology.com/platinum/samples/rubrics/
- http://myt4l.com/index.php?v=pl&page_ac=view&type=tools&tool=rubricmaker
- http://www.mcasmentor.com/rubrics.htm.

What Is iRubric?

iRubric is a comprehensive digital rubric development, assessment, and sharing tool (maker/builder). It shows the major skills and sub-skills to be mastered, the different mastery levels, and marks allocated to each level. The following are the basic terms used in an iRubric and their definitions:

- *Analytical Rubric:* Articulates levels of performance for each criterion.
- *Holistic Rubric:* Assesses performance across multiple criteria as a whole.
- *Rubric Criteria:* Characteristics of a performance. They are generally listed in rows.
- *Criteria Descriptors:* Describe what is expected at each level of performance.
- *Levels (of performance):* Describe quality of work. They are generally listed in columns.
- *Divider:* Is a special row that divides a rubric into sections. A *simple divider* only divides the section without changing the levels, whereas a *weighted divider* allows changing of level titles and weights for a section of a rubric.

Steps of Building and Using Digital Rubrics

Steps for building a digital rubric using the iRubric tool of Rcampus, for applying the digital rubric to an assignment, for entering the grades, for viewing the students' grades, for sharing and discussing the rubric with other instructors, and for categorizing the rubric are shown in webpages 1-15 below.

Conclusion

The effective use of Rubrics requires that rubrics be of high quality in order to have positive effects in the classroom. A well-constructed rubric identifies the criteria for a successful performance and describes the qualities of strong, adequate, and weak performances. With the rubric as a guide, students learn to monitor their own progress and make improvements in a timely manner (Yoshina

& Harada, 2007; Shepherd & Mullane , 2008). In order for raters to use digital rubrics effectively, they should be well trained on how to design and employ rubrics (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010).

Appendicies

Webpage 1: Go to the Rcampus iRubric Homepage at http://www.rcampus.com and register for an account.
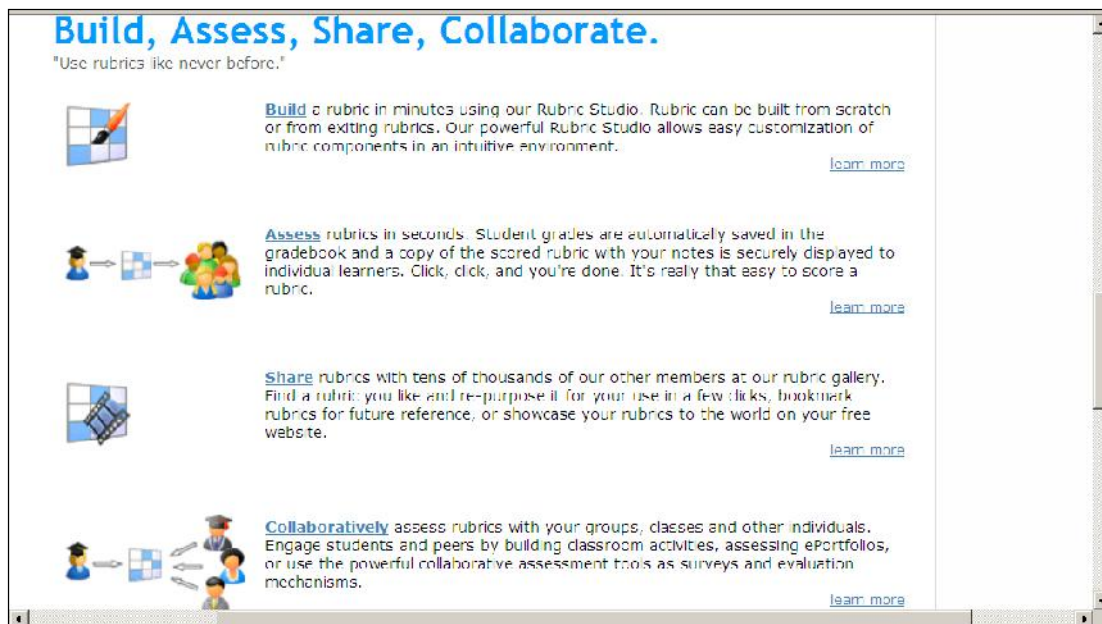
Webpage 2: To build a new digital rubric, click "Build". Option (A) Create a new rubric from scratch; (B) Revise an existing rubric; (C) Duplicate and re-purpose an existing rubric.

Webpage 3: Rubric Building Page. Click "add row (criterion)", "add simple divider
(section)", or "add full divider (sub-rubric)" underneath the rubric.

iRubric *Powered by*	**Paragraph rubric**		
	Excellent - 2 pts	**Average - 1 pt**	**Poor - 0 pts**
Topic sentence	*Excellent* Paragraph has a well-developed, clearly defined, engaging topic sentence.	*Average* Topic sentence may be incomplete, partially inaccurate.	*Poor* Topic sentence is missing or faulty. Topic sentence is unintelligible and does not state what is being defined.
Detail 1	*Excellent* Detail is concrete, specific, relevant.	*Average* Details may be insufficient, unrelated to topic, uninteresting, abstract or unspecific. May lack logical, chronological, spatial, whole-part order.	*Poor* Detail is wrong, lacking, unrelated to the topic sentence, unintelligible, or incomplete.
Detail2	*Excellent* Detail is concrete, specific, relevant.	*Average* Details may be insufficient, unrelated to topic, abstract, uninteresting, or unspecific. May lack logical, spatial, chronological, whole-part order.	*Poor* Detail is wrong, lacking, unrelated to the topic sentence, unintelligible, or incomplete.
Detail 3	*Excellent* Detail is concrete, specific, relevant.	*Average* Details may be insufficient, unrelated to topic, uninteresting, abstract or unspecific. May lack logical, chronological, spatial, whole-part order.	*Poor* Detail is wrong, lacking, unrelated to the topic sentence, unintelligible, or incomplete.
Conclusion	*Excellent* Conclusion summarizes content.	*Average* Conclusion does not adequately restate topic.	*Poor* No concluding sentence.
Cohesion and Coherence	*Excellent* Ideas are well-connected. Details are organized logically, chronologically, spatially, sequentially, inductively, or	*Average* Some ideas are not well-connected. Writing may not be smooth, coherent. Some transitional words and	*Poor* Details are not well-connected, lack order. Writing is confusing and hard to follow. Contains fragments and/or run-on

	deductively, whole-part. Writing is smooth, coherent. Sentences are strong, expressive with varied structure. Transitional words and conjunctions are used appropriately.	conjunctions are missing or misused. Some sentences are not strong, some lack variety.	sentences. Transitional words and conjunctions are either missing or misused.
Grammar	***Excellent*** Fewer than 4 errors in grammar. Correct use of word order, articles, verb tense, phrasal verbs, subject-verb agreement …etc.	***Average*** Between 5-9 errors in grammar. Errors do not affect legibility and understanding.	***Poor*** More than 10 grammatical mistakes or 2 errors per line.
Spelling	***Excellent*** Fewer than 3 errors in spelling,	***Average*** Between 5-9 errors in spelling. Errors do not affect legibility and understanding.	***Poor*** More than 10 spelling errors or 2 errors per line.
Punctuation and Capitalization	***Excellent*** Fewer than 3 errors in spelling,	***Average*** Between 5-9 errors in punctuation or capitalization.	**Poor** Punctuation and capitalization are missing or incorrectly used.
Format & Layout	**Excellent** Paragraph is well-formatted with proper indentation and centered heading. Handwriting is very easy to read	**Average** Handwriting is mostly legible. Paper is somewhat neat.	**Poor** Heading is not centered. No indentation. Handwriting is mostly illegible. Paper is messy

Webpage 4: A Paragraph Writing Analytic Rubric

iRubric	Paragraph Writing		
	Excellent - 5 pts	**Good - 3 pts**	**Poor - 1 pt**
Paragraph Content	***Excellent*** Paragraph has a title, a well-developed, clearly defined, engaging topic sentence. It has 3-5 interesting, concrete and specific, relevant details, organized logically, chronologically, spatially, sequentially, inductively,	***Good*** Paragraph has some of the following weak-nesses: Topic sentence may be incomplete. Details may be in-sufficient, unrelated to topic, uninteresting, abstract or unspecific. May lack logical, chronological, spatial,	***Poor*** No title or messy title. No topic sentence or faulty topic sentence. Topic sentence is unintelligible and does not state what is being defined. Details are wrong, lacking, unrelated to the topic

	Excellent	Good	Poor
	or deductively, whole-part. Paragraph has a conclusion that summarizes content. Writing is smooth, coherent. Ideas are well-connected. Sentences are strong, expressive with varied structure. Transitional words and con-junctions are used appropriately.	whole-part order. Con-clusion does not adequately restate to-pic. Writing may not be smooth, coherent. Some ideas may not be well-connected. Some transitional words and con-junctions are missing or misused. Some sentences are not strong, some lack variety.	sentence, unintelligible, or in-complete. No conclu-ding sentence. De-tails are not well-connected, lack order. Writing is confusing and hard to follow. Contains fragments and/ or run-on sentences. Transitional words and con-junctions are either missing or misused.
Paragraph form	***Excellent*** Paragraph has fewer than 3 errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and/or indentation. Correct use of word order, articles, verb tense, phrasal verbs, subject verb agreement, etc. Correct use of punctuation, spelling, or capitalization. Handwriting very easy to read. Paper is neat	***Good*** Between 4-9 errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization, and/or indentation. Grammatical and spelling errors do not affect legibility and understanding. Handwriting is mostly legible. Paper is somewhat neat. Paper somewhat neat	***Poor*** It has more than 10 grammatical, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and/or indentation errors. Distracting or errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. Handwriting is mostly illegible. Paper is messy.

Webpage 5: A Paragraph Writing Analytic Rubric (Continued).
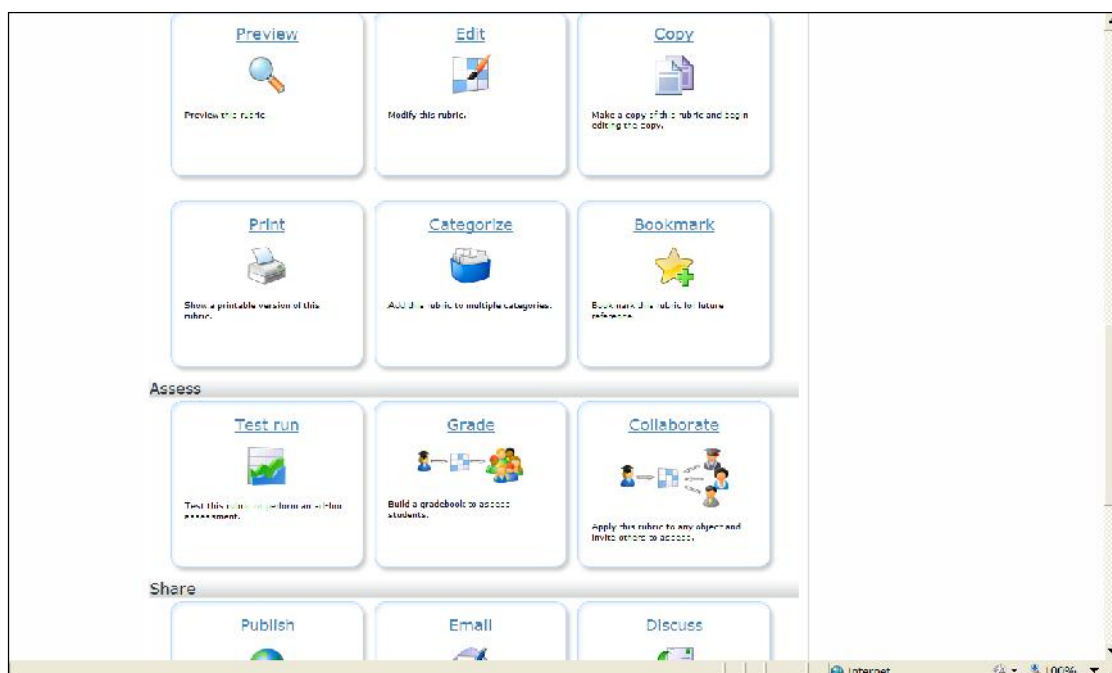
Webpage 6: These action buttons appear underneath the rubric after saving it. Click any of the links if you need to preview, edit, copy, print, categorize, bookmark, test-run, grade, collaborate, publish, e-mail, or discuss the rubric that you have built. An explanation of each action button is given.

Webpage 7: To apply the rubric to an online assignment, click "apply to" in the menu above the saved rubric.

Webpage 8: To apply the rubric to coursework or an object for collaborative assessment such as a document, a website, a book or any object, click the required one from the list.
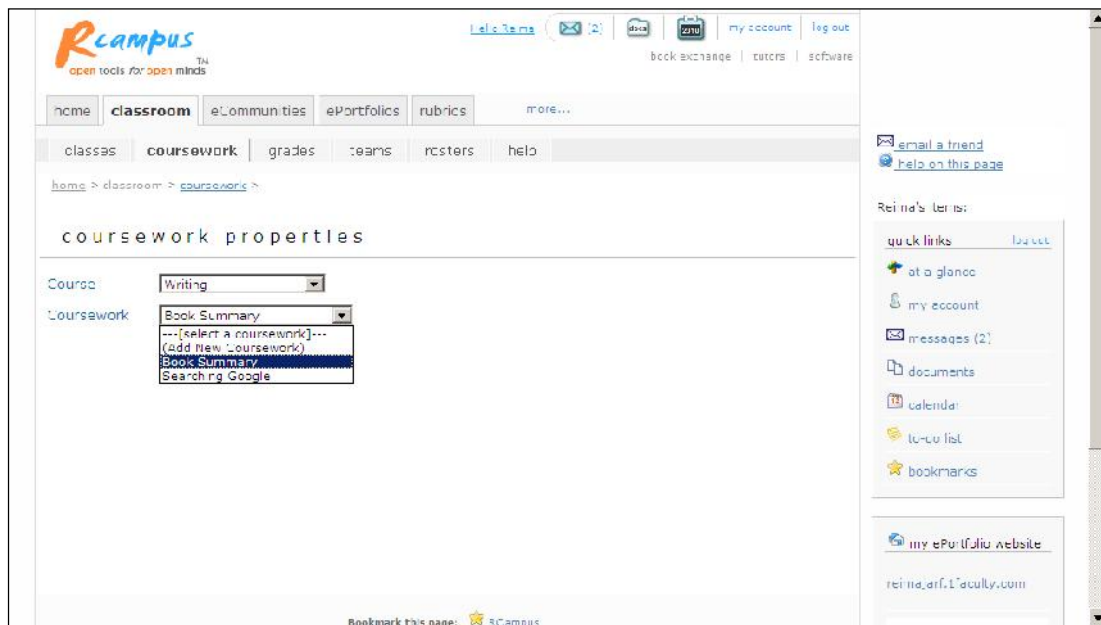
Webpage 9: To apply the rubric to a coursework, select the course title and type of coursework to be evaluated from the drop-down menus.
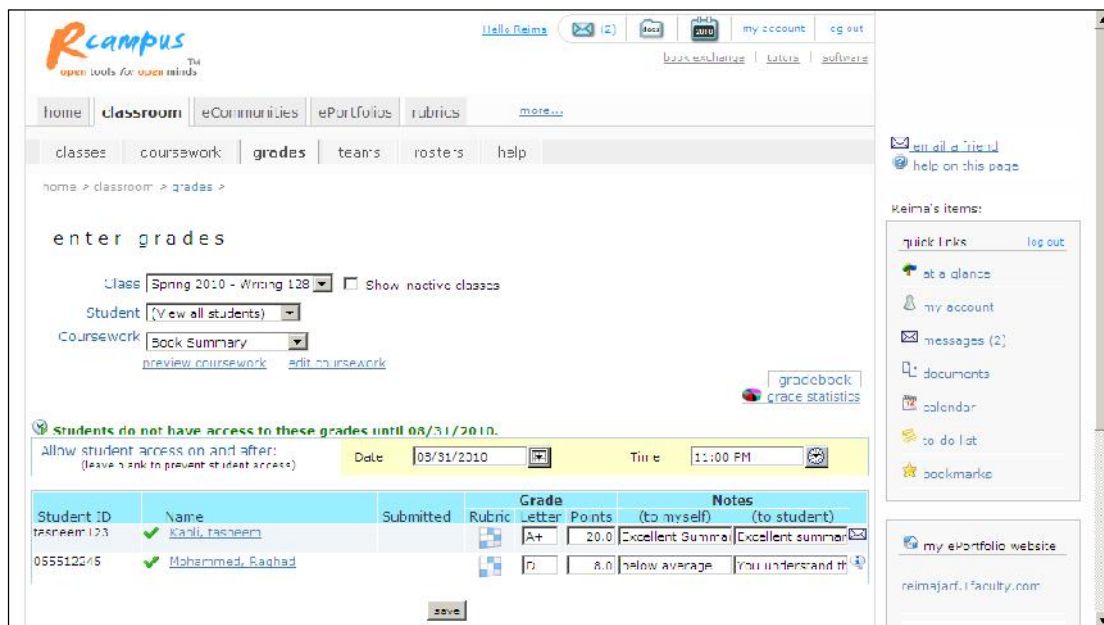
Webpage 10: To enter the grades, click on the rubric in front of a student's name. This will transfer you to the rubric page.

Webpage 11: To score a student's assignments (i) Click on one level per criterion to select it. (ii) Once finished, click on [save] below the rubric. (iii) Student grade will be calculated and entered in gradebook.

Webpage 12: Students' gradebook.

Webpage 13: To view an individual student's gradebook, click on a student's name on the list**.**

Webpage 14: To share a rubric with other teachers, select one of the options on this page.
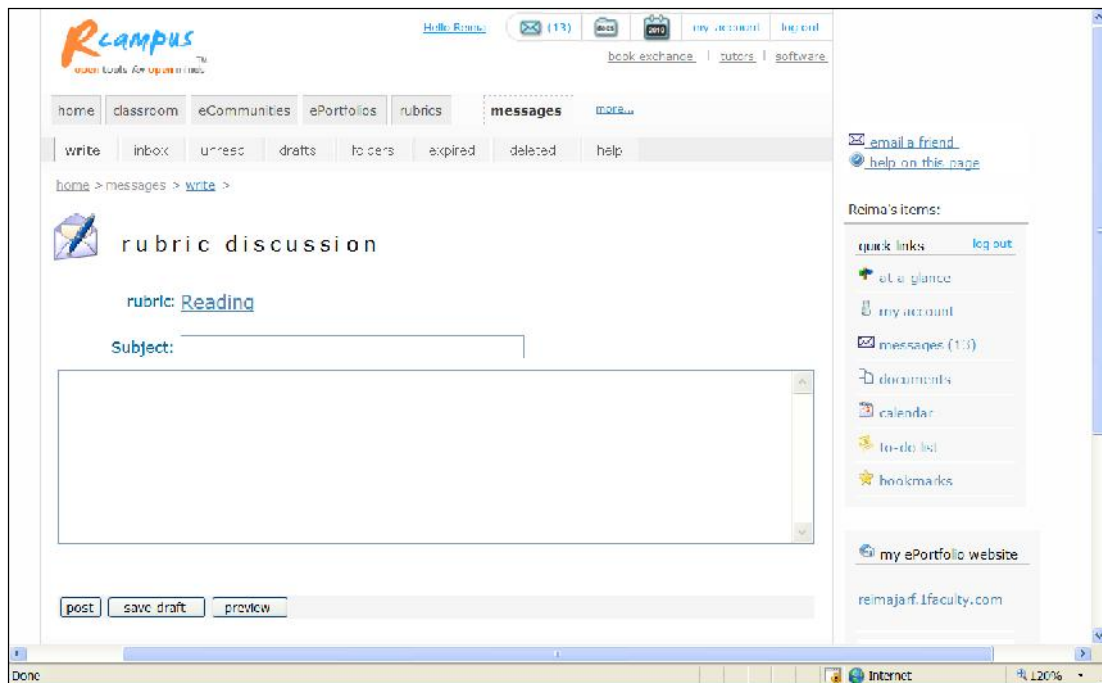
Webpage 15: To discuss a rubric with colleagues or students, write a subject in the subject area and the issue to be discussed in the message box as in a typical online forum or e-mail.
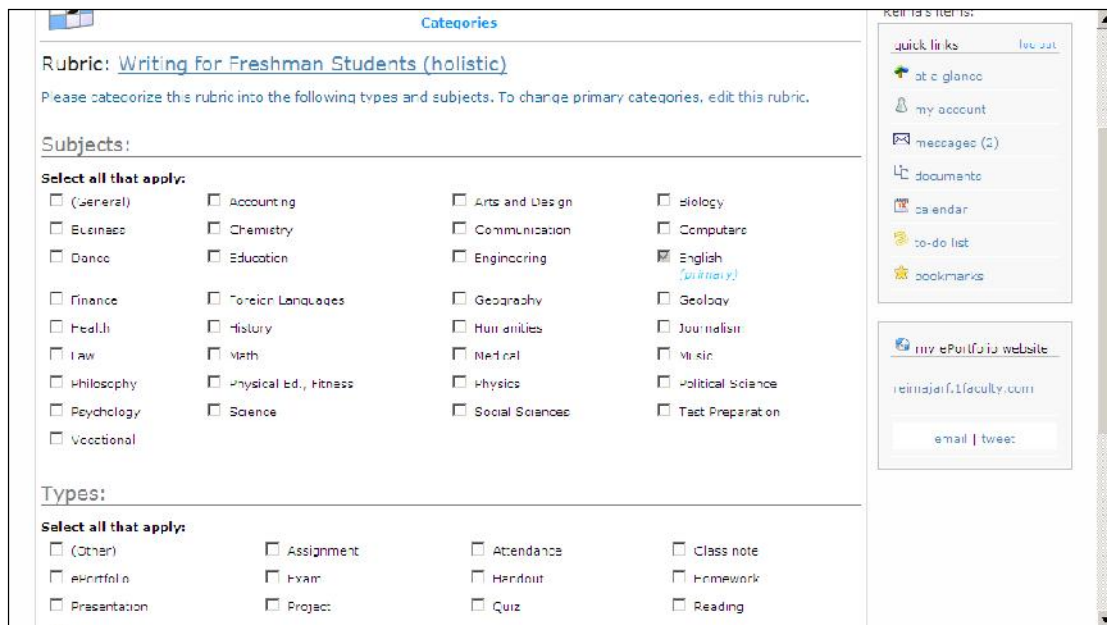
Webpage 16: To categorize a rubric, select the subject area and the type of task to which the rubric applies.

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